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ABSTRACT

The present study examined Mexican-American and white subjects' response to same race stimulus persons who were differentiated only by the similarity of their beliefs to the subjects' beliefs. The prediction that a stimulus person whose beliefs are unknown and who is the same race as the subject would be responded to as if he had beliefs similar to the subject rather than as if he had beliefs dissimilar to the subject was supported. (Author)

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# MEXICAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE REACTIONS TO SAME RACE STIMULUS PERSONS AS A FUNCTION OF BELIEF SIMILARITY

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Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960) proposed that ethnic and racial prejudice are a special case of belief prejudice. That is, the dissimilarity of the beliefs of another person and one's own beliefs plays a greater role in prejudice than does race or ethnicity. Rokeach (1961) limited the generality of the theory by suggesting that in order for beliefs to supersede racial or ethnic factors as the primary determinant of prejudice, the beliefs of the stimulus person must be salient. Although there is a controversy about the viability of Rokeach et al's theory (e.g., Dienstbier, 1972, Triandis, 1961; Triandis & Davis, 1965), studies that have examined prejudice as a function of race and belief and that have not provided belief information for a subset of their stimulus persons support Rokeach's modification of the original theory (Byrne & Wong, 1962; Davenport, 1971; Hendrick, Bixenstein, & Hawkins, 1971; Stein, Hardyck, & Smith, 1965).

Regardless of the saliency of the beliefs, however, it would be expected that the mean response to a same race stimulus person whose beliefs are unknown should fall between the mean responses to the stimulus person whose beliefs are similar to the subject's, and the stimulus persons whose beliefs are dissimilar to the subject's. This expectation has been supported by Davenport (1971), Orpen (1972), Stein (1966), and Stein et al. (1965).

Stein et al. further refined the expected relationship by proposing that same race stimulus persons with unknown beliefs will be perceived as more like same race stimulus persons with similar beliefs than same race stimulus persons with dissimilar beliefs.

To test this proposal, the present study focused primarily on the belief dimension and examined Mexican-American and White subjects' responses to same race stimulus persons. It was designed to test the relationship between ratings of stimulus persons whose beliefs were unknown and ratings of stimulus persons whose beliefs were similar or dissimilar to the subject's. A factorial design was utilized to provide a more direct and statistically powerful test of the phenomenon than did Davenport (1971) and Stein et al. (1965). In addition, the present experiment utilized three dependent measures related to prejudice (friendliness, similarity, and social distance) rather than one. Finally, both the Mexican-American and White subjects attended the same integrated school and had interacted with persons of the other race.

## Method

Subjects. Responses were obtained from 44 Mexican-American and 44 White ninth grade students. The subjects attended the same integrated high school and were from working class homes in a Southwestern metropolitan area.

Experimental materials. Five questionnaires were used. An information sheet asked for the sex, grade, program in school, last year's grades, and race of the subject. A value scale

consisting of 25 items tapped the subject's beliefs, on a five-point scale, regarding what teenagers in general ought to be like. A similarity scale measured, on a five-point scale, responses to the question, "How much like you would you say Teenager X is?". A friendliness scale measured, on a four-point scale, responses to the question, "If you met this teenager for the first time, what would your immediate reaction be?". The social distance scale (Stein et al., 1965) asked how close a relationship the subject would be willing to have with Teenager X for 11 situations varying in degree of intimacy.

Procedure. The data were collected in two sessions. In the first session, information regarding the subject's background and beliefs was obtained. In addition, two stimulus persons whose beliefs were unknown were rated on the similarity, friendliness, and social distance scales.

During a six-week interim, the responses of the subjects to the value scale were examined and then used to construct descriptions of four stimulus teenagers. The method of creating stimulus persons was the same as that used by Stein et al., 1965) and Davenport (1971). For each subject, two Mexican-American teenagers and two White teenagers with beliefs tailored to be similar and dissimilar to the subject's were created.

In the second session, the subjects read the general information on the value sheet for each of the four stimulus persons and then rated each on the similarity, friendliness and social distance scales. Each subject rated six stimulus persons. In

the first session, each subject rated one White and one Mexican-American for whom no information about beliefs was provided. In the second session, each subject rated one White and one Mexican-American with beliefs similar to the subject's and one White and one Mexican-American with beliefs dissimilar from the subject's.

## Results

The results of three 2 (race of subject) x 3 (belief similarity) analyses of variance with repeated measures on belief similarity computed for the responses to each of the three scales for same race stimuli indicated a significant main effect for belief similarity ($F = 11.96$, $F = 16.48$, and $F = 20.35$, $p<.01$ for the similarity, friendliness, and social distance scales, respectively). There was a significant main effect for race of subject only on the friendliness scale ($F = 6.86$, $p<.01$) and no significant interactions. Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for the responses to the same race stimulus persons on the similarity, friendliness, and social distance scales.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Support for the prediction that a stimulus person whose beliefs are unknown and who is the same race as the subject will be rated as if he had beliefs similar to the subject required that there be no significant difference between the means for the stimulus person of the same race with similar beliefs and the stimulus person of the same race with unknown beliefs. In

addition, it was necessary that there be a significant difference between the stimulus person of the same race with unknown beliefs and the stimulus person of the same race with dissimilar beliefs.

A Newman-Keuls test ($\alpha = .05$) computed on the data from the similarity scale revealed that for White subjects there was no significant difference between mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.98$) and the same race stimulus person with similar beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.59$). In addition, there was a significant difference between the mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.98$) and the same race stimulus person with dissimilar beliefs ($\bar{X} = 2.64$).

A similar test of the responses made by Mexican-American subjects to the similarity scale agreed with the results for the White subjects. The mean responses to same race stimulus persons with unknown beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.56$) were not significantly different from the mean responses to same race stimulus persons with similar beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.66$). In addition, there was a significant difference between the mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown beliefs ($\bar{X} = 1.56$) and the same race stimulus person with dissimilar beliefs ($\bar{X} = 2.16$).

The hypothesized relationship was supported for both White and Mexican-American subjects on the friendliness scale. For White subjects, there was no significant difference between the mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X} = .93$) and similar beliefs ($\bar{X} = .91$). There was a significant

difference between the mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = .93) and dissimilar beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = 1.48). For Mexican-American subjects, there was no significant difference between the mean response to the same race stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = .41) and similar beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = .52). A significant difference was obtained between the mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = .41) and dissimilar beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = 1.02).

The analysis of the responses to the social distance scale revealed that, for White subjects, there was no significant difference between mean responses to the same race stimulus person with unknown beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = 8.27) and mean responses to the same race stimulus person with similar beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = 7.89). There was a significant difference between the mean responses to the same race stimulus persons with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = 8.27) and dissimilar beliefs ($\bar{X}$ = 6.27). For the Mexican-American subjects, there was no significant difference between mean responses to the stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = 7.75) and similar ($\bar{X}$ = 7.14) beliefs. There was a significant difference between mean responses to the stimulus person with unknown ($\bar{X}$ = 7.75) and dissimilar ($\bar{X}$ = 5.95) beliefs.

## Discussion

Although similarity, friendliness, and social distance do not cover all aspects of prejudice, the results of the present study are consistent with the relationship proposed by Stein et al. (1965). Moreover, the support was manifest by both White

and Mexican-American subjects on the similarity, friendliness, and social distance scales. Thus, for an unknown stimulus person of the same race, both Mexican-American and White subjects indicated that they (1) assumed he had similar beliefs, (2) would be friendly toward him upon first meeting, and (3) perceived a minimal social distance between themselves and the stimulus person.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to the Similarity, Friendliness, and Social Distance Scales

| | | Similar beliefs | | Unknown beliefs | | Dissimilar beliefs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | $\bar{X}$ | s.d. | $\bar{X}$ | s.d. | $\bar{X}$ | s.d. |
| Similarity Scale | White Ss | 1.59 | 1.09 | 1.98 | 1.10 | 2.64 | 1.30 |
| | Mexican-American Ss | 1.66 | 1.23 | 1.56 | 1.25 | 2.16 | 1.40 |
| Friendliness Scale | White Ss | .91 | 1.06 | .93 | .89 | 1.48 | 1.12 |
| | Mexican-American Ss | .52 | .84 | .41 | .65 | 1.02 | .87 |
| Social Scale | White Ss | 7.89 | 3.50 | 8.27 | 3.12 | 6.27 | 3.60 |
| | Mexican-American Ss | 7.14 | 2.87 | 7.75 | 2.58 | 5.95 | 2.59 |

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